

KICKAPOO

The Fighting Bronco

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M. and C. W. GAUSS



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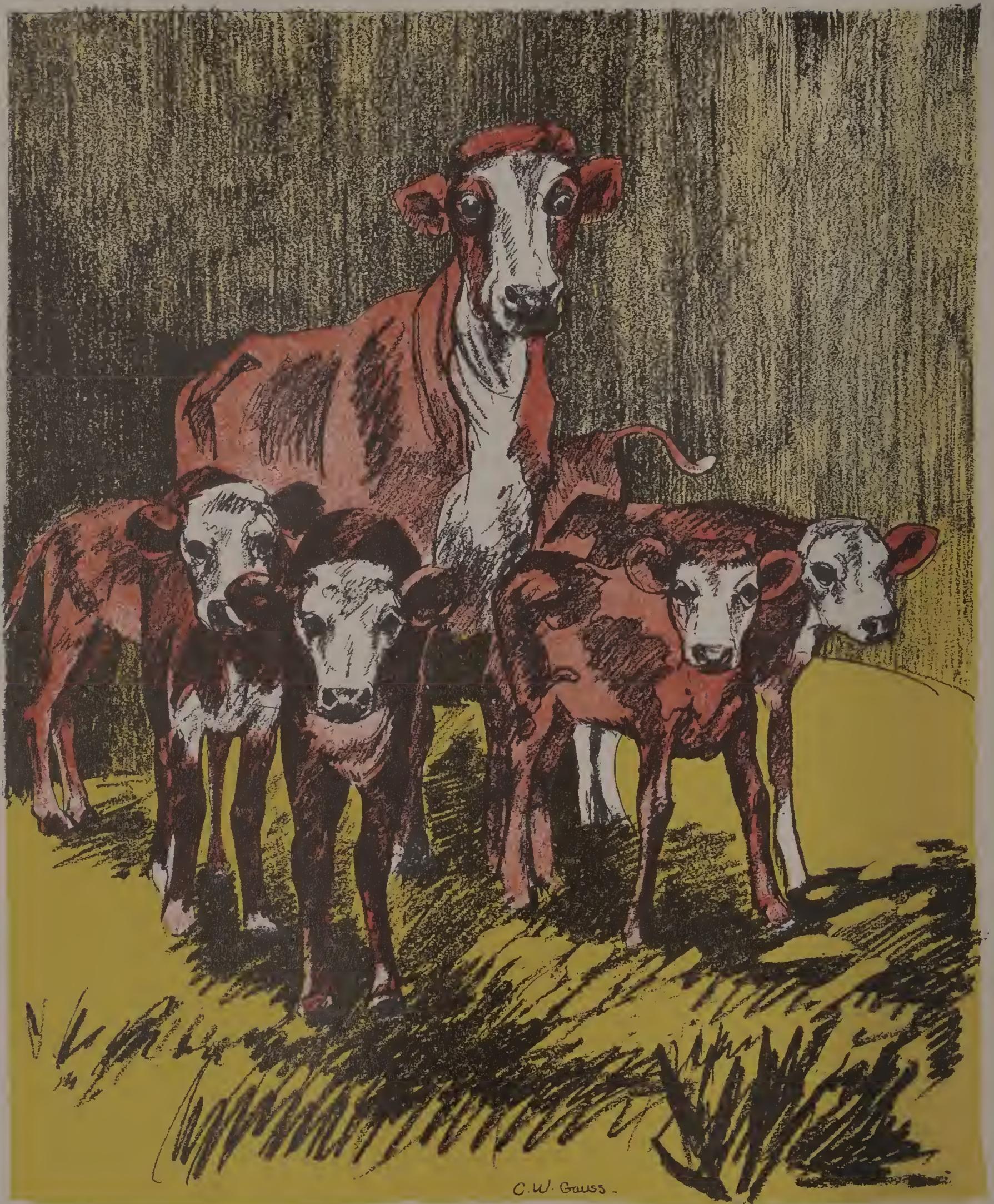
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KICKAPOO
The Fighting Bronco





C.W. Gauss -

Suddenly Old Red sniffed the wind

KICKAPOO

The Fighting Bronco

By

M. and C. W. Gauss

Co-Author and Artist of

BOOK OF THE WOODS

*BANG OF THE DIAMOND TAIL and
FIRECRACKER, THE WILD BRONCO*



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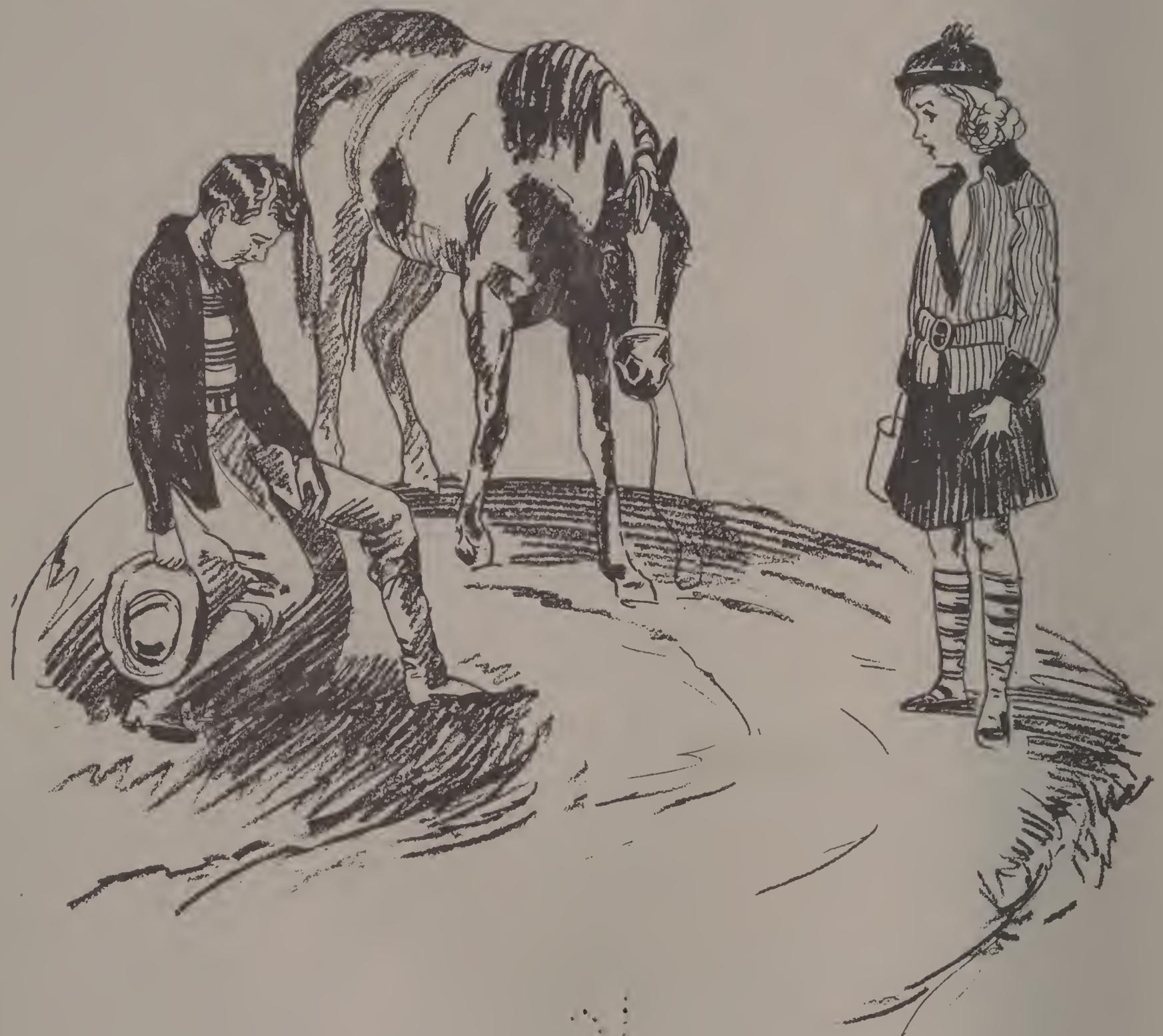
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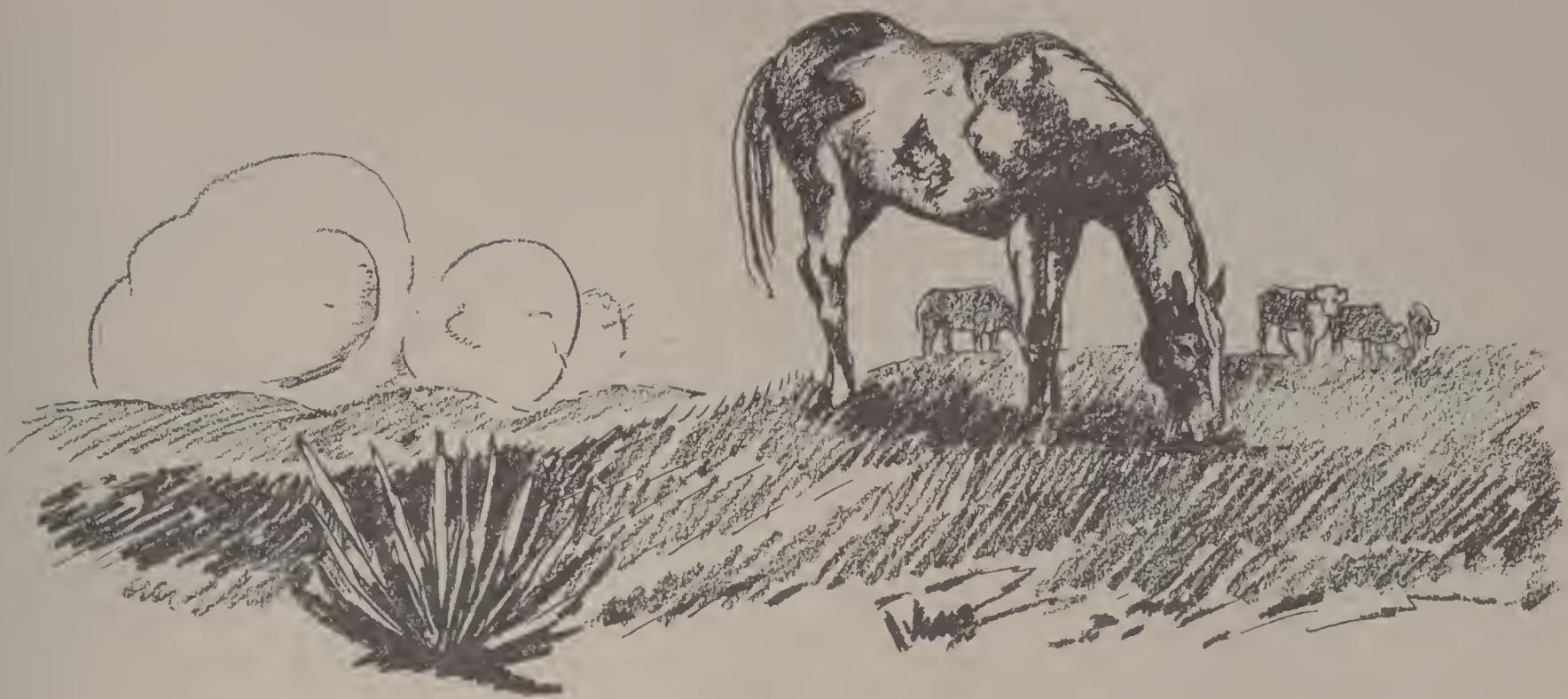
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KICKAPOO

I

IT began to grow dark over the mesa where the cattle strayed.

Kickapoo, the fighting bronco, was eating the grass near a bunch of calves. He was a small, spotted cow pony, and in the dusk he looked as if he had on a calico coat. One of his flanks was marked with the brand XYZ to show that he belonged to the XYZ cattle ranch.

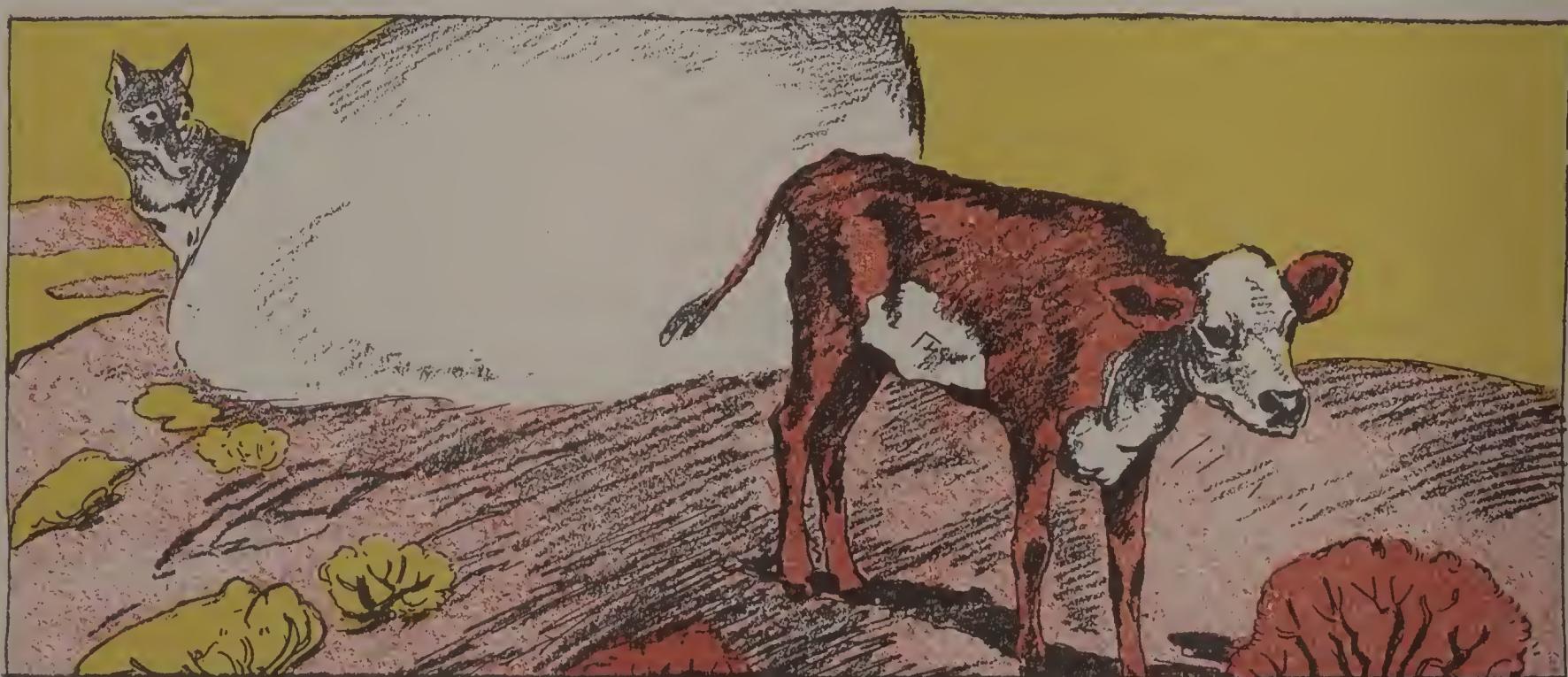
The calves were eating grass, too. With them was one big cow, who just stood, chewing her cud. Her name was Old Red. The other mother cows had gone to the river to drink. They trusted Old Red to take care of their calves.

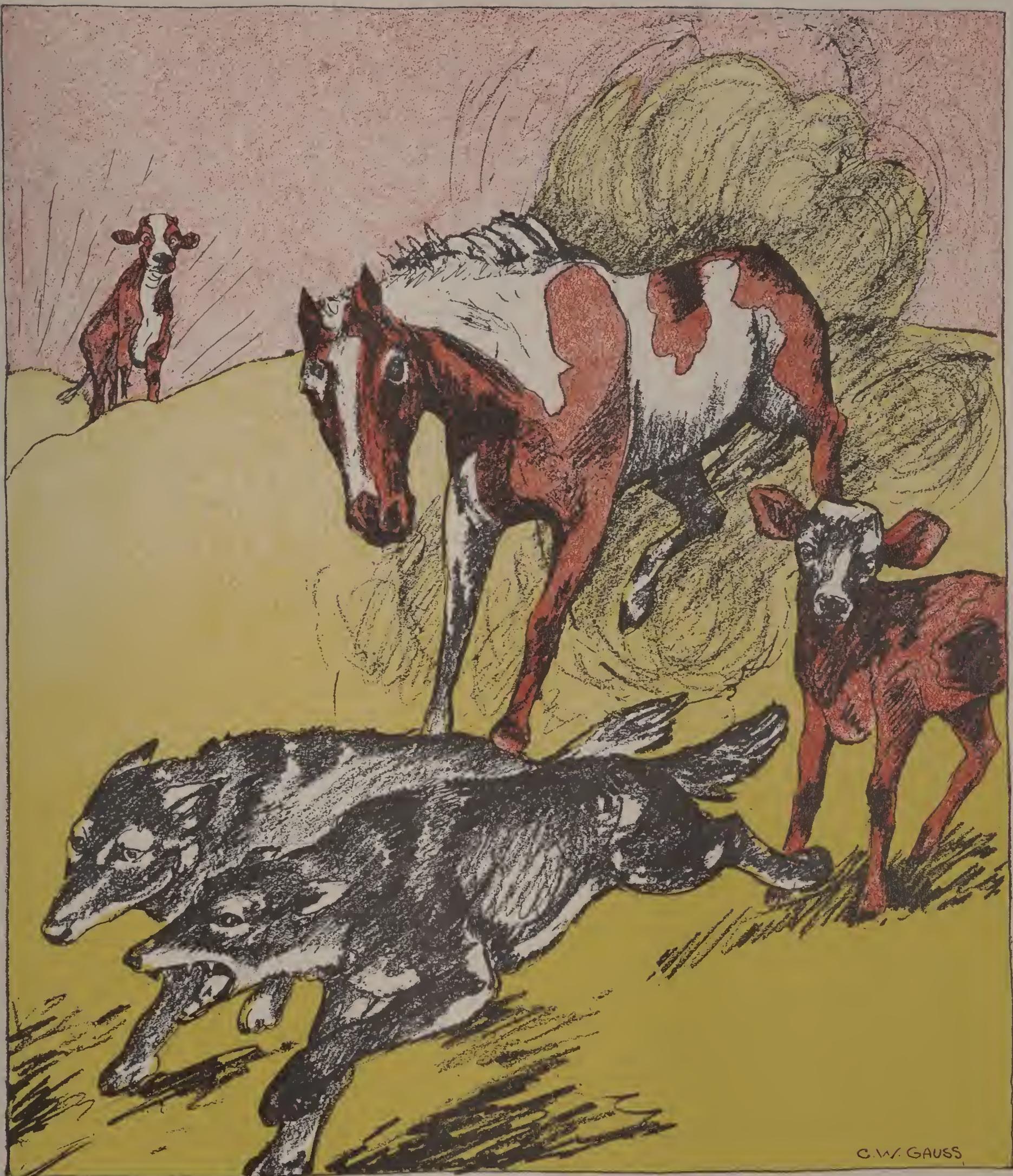
Suddenly Old Red sniffed the wind. Her eyes grew wild with fright, and she muttered to the calves as if to say, "Come right here to me!" Her own twin babies got between her legs. The other calves came close around her.

The wind carried the scent of coyotes. From behind a rock a pair of sharp eyes appeared, then a nose with a hump on it. Broken Nose silently watched every move of the XYZ calves. Five other coyotes squatted around him behind the rock.

Old Red felt helpless and worried. Alone, she could not take care of so many calves. So she started to low for help, "Moo, moo," and the calves helped her. They said, "Ma-aa, ma-aa!"

Old Red looked toward the river, hoping the other mothers would come, but there was no sign of them. She mooed louder, hoping the cowboys were near, but no cowboys heard her.





Kickapoo went straight for Broken Nose

The pack of coyotes began to move closer. They thought a tender, fat calf would make a fine supper for them.

Kickapoo stuck up his ears and looked around to see what had frightened Old Red. He also sniffed the wind. Then he saw the pack of sneaking coyotes.

Perhaps he recognized Broken Nose. They had met once before when Broken Nose had tried to bite Kickapoo. Quick as lightning Kickapoo had kicked with his hind feet and had broken the coyote's nose. That is why he was called Broken Nose.

Now Kickapoo laid back his ears and ran to help the cow. He went straight for Broken Nose, who knew very well what a fighting bronco can do with his sharp hoofs. The coyote gave a shrill cry, "Ye-o-ow!" It must have meant, "Run for your lives!" because every coyote in the pack ran away like the wind.

A full moon rose over the mesa. In its soft light nothing could be seen except grass and flowers, an old red cow taking care of some calves, and a lone cow pony. Soon the other mother cows returned. Then Old Red had her turn to go for a drink, and Kickapoo went back to his supper.

The next day there was a show, called a rodeo, at

the XYZ ranch. Cowboys from all the neighboring ranches came to show their skill in riding and cattle roping. Kickapoo and his master, Cowboy Buster, and a boy named Pete were there. Pete wanted to be a cowboy, but he had no horse. He thought Kickapoo the finest cow pony in the world.

Other people admired Kickapoo, too. He had won many prizes at rodeos, and once his picture had been in a newspaper. People came to look at so fine a horse. His master, Cowboy Buster, often said that he would not sell Kickapoo at any price.

When it was time for the rodeo to start, Buster said to Pete, "You may ride Kickapoo to the corral if he will let you." Pete was delighted. He got up into Buster's saddle and rode proudly to the fenced-in place where the cowboys were ready to have their show.

Pete seated himself on the fence just as a judge shouted, "The first event will be steer roping. The cowboy who ropes and ties a steer in the shortest time wins a prize."

Cowboy Twister was first to try. He mounted his own white pony and sat waiting while the men turned a bucking steer into the corral. The steer ran, and when he got to a certain line, the judge looked at his



watch and waved a red flag. Then Twister went after the steer. As soon as he could, he threw his lariat around the steer's hind leg and made the animal fall down. Then he jumped off his pony and quickly tied the steer's feet.

"Twister roped the steer in forty seconds," announced the judge.

Then Twister rode his pony out of the corral. As he passed Buster, he said, "I don't think you can beat that, Buster."

"I'm going to try," Buster answered grinning. "You did quite well, but Kickapoo is a mighty fine cow horse and I think I can beat you."

After several other cowboys had shown what they could do, the judge called for Buster on Kickapoo. The men let another big steer into the corral. With head down and back arched, it bucked down the field. The red flag waved. Immediately Kickapoo's swift hoofs sent up little clouds of dust as he carried Buster toward the steer.



Pete thought Kickapoo the finest cow pony in the world

Kickapoo was smart. When Buster had roped the steer, the cow pony stood still with his hoofs planted firmly on the ground and held the rope tight so that the steer could not get up. That gave Buster a good chance to tie the steer's feet quickly. Finished, he stood up and waved his hat around; it was a very large one, called a ten-gallon hat.

"Buster on Kickapoo . . . twenty-one seconds!" shouted the judge. "Buster wins the prize."

The judge tied a blue ribbon on Kickapoo's mane; it looked just like a hair ribbon. Kickapoo tried to shake it off. He would rather fight coyotes than show off.

The next event was bulldogging. This is a hard trick for both man and horse. It is a way of throwing a steer to the ground. A cowboy rides his pony up close to the steer, so close that the cowboy can grab hold of the steer's horns and slide to the ground close to the steer's neck. Digging his heels into the ground, the cowboy firmly twists the steer's horns, which, if he is successful, throws the steer to the ground.

Buster and Kickapoo tried for the bulldogging prize. The cowboys turned a very big, wild steer into the corral. Plunging and kicking, the steer tried to

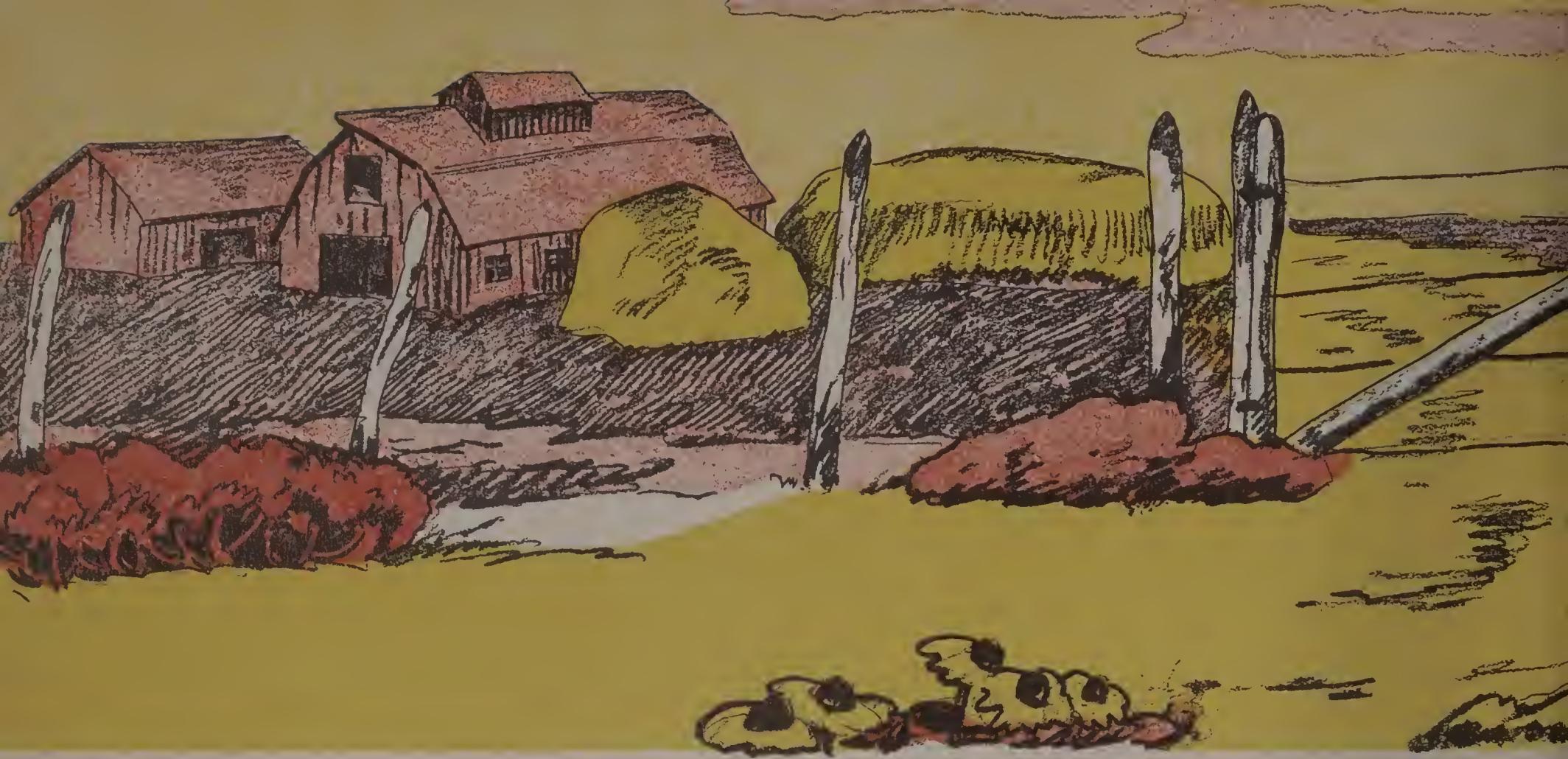


get away. A man called a hazer rode his pony beside the steer to keep him going straight while Buster came near on Kickapoo.

Just as Buster reached for the horns, the steer made a great leap sideways. Buster missed; he hit the ground with a thud and rolled in the dust. The steer turned quickly, as fast as the eye could see, and rushed for Kickapoo. In his mad rush he stepped on Buster. Then he tripped Kickapoo so that the pony fell into the fence, with the steer on top of him.

The steer kicked and bellowed. Kickapoo screamed to show that he was hurt. The air was filled with dust, in which horse and steer seemed all mixed up together.

While Buster lay still on the ground, Twister and another cowboy ran to help. They threw ropes around the steer and dragged him out of the corral. Others ran to see what they could do for Buster.

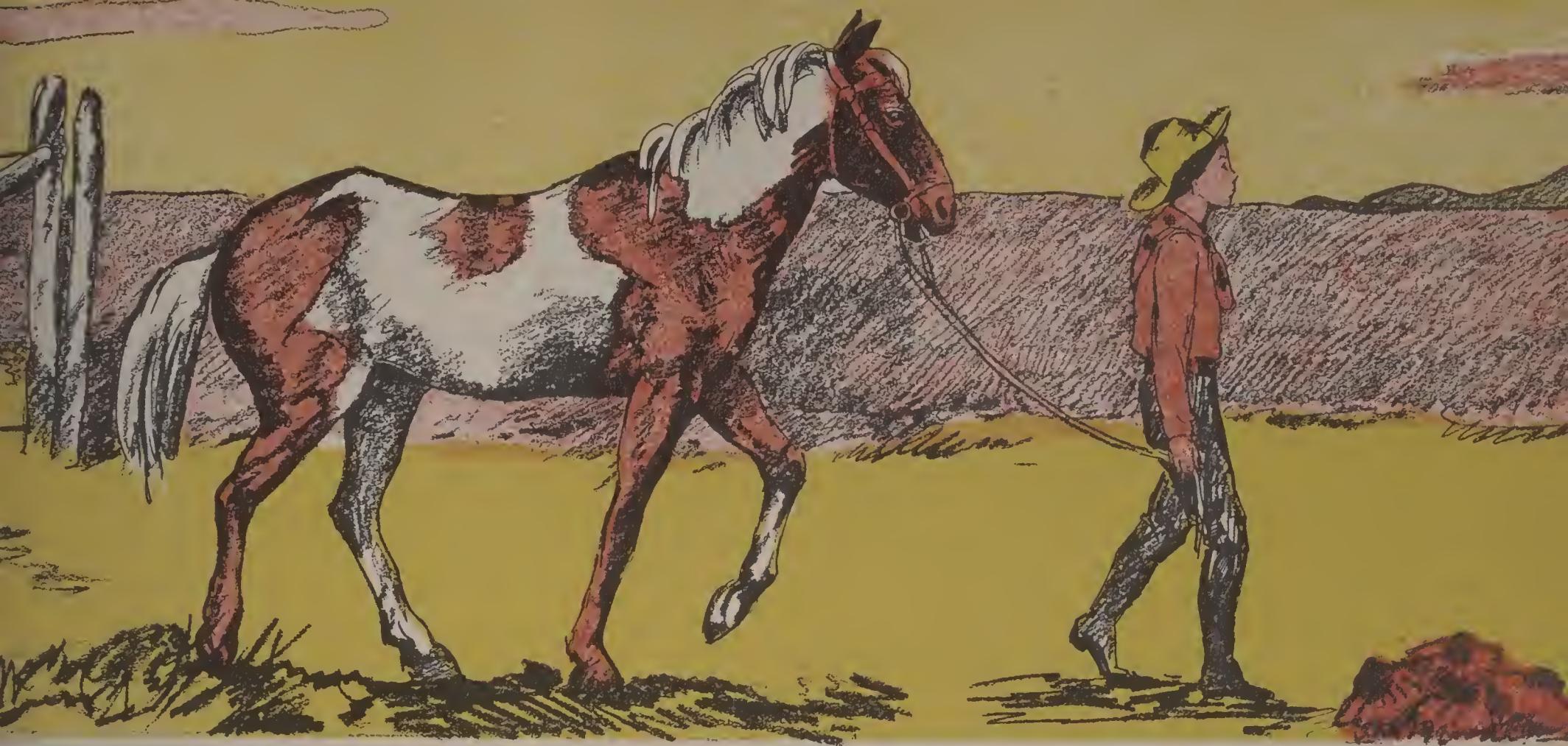


Pete jumped down from his place on the fence and ran to Kickapoo. One of the cow pony's shoulders had been cut deeply by the steer's long horns. Pete washed off the dirt and blood and led him out of the corral.

A few days later Twister and Pete and Cowboy Buster, with Kickapoo near as always, were together at the ranch again. Cowboy Buster had been badly hurt, and Kickapoo limped when he walked. He did not look like a fine horse any more.

"The doctor says that I can't rope steers any more," Buster said sadly. "If I can't rope steers, I can't be a cowboy. And if I can't be a cowboy, I might as well leave this country right now. My uncle has wanted me to come home and work in his store. Now I suppose I might as well do it."

"What will you do with Kickapoo?" asked Twister.



"I hate to part with that horse," answered Buster, "but I can't take him with me. I'll have to sell him."

Kickapoo heard his name and nickered to his master. He did not know that Buster was talking of leaving him.

"Nobody will buy him now," said Twister. "He's lame."

"That's true," agreed Buster. "Maybe I'll have to give him away."

"Oh, give him to me," quickly spoke up Pete.

Buster knew how much Pete wanted a horse of his own and that he liked Kickapoo.

"Will you be good to him?" asked Buster.

"Oh, yes, I certainly will," replied Pete.

"Then you may have him."

Buster patted his pony good-by, and Pete led Kickapoo to his new home.

Pete's father was not a cattleman; he was a nester. This means that he had only a small farm in the cattle country.

When Pete reached home, he shouted, "Daddy, I have a horse!" And then he told how Buster had given him Kickapoo.

"But what will we feed him?" asked Pete's father. "The grasshoppers ate all our corn this summer. We really haven't enough food for our mule, and he works for us. That horse is lame; he can't work."

Pete knew that he had forgotten how little food there was at his house.

"I know he's lame," said Pete quietly, "but Kickapoo was a mighty fine horse, and he'll get better. I wanted him for my horse, and I thought he and I could work together. But if we can't feed him, I'll have to take him back to Buster."

Disappointed, Pete took Kickapoo back to the XYZ ranch in the morning. There the boss of the ranch told Pete that Buster had already gone home. Pete explained why he was there with Kickapoo and finished by asking, "Can Kickapoo go in with your horses, then, sir?"

The boss of the XYZ looked Kickapoo all over. Then, shaking his head, he said, "This bronco is lame.



He can't work. All of my horses must work. He can't go in with them."

"But Kickapoo hasn't any other place to go," said Pete.

"Turn him out on the mesa and he'll find his own food," answered the boss, already walking away.

Pete didn't like to do that, but he didn't know what else to do. So he and Kickapoo walked slowly to the mesa, and there Pete let the pony go free.

Kickapoo wandered out on the mesa, stopping for a bite of grass here and there, wherever he found it. At first he wondered where all the other cow ponies were and why his master did not come for him. Part of the time he was glad that instead of working, he could just stand still and let the sun warm his sore shoulder. The rest of the time he was busy hunting enough to eat.

The grass was short and poor; grasshoppers had eaten nearly all of it. When Kickapoo walked, swarms of the long brown insects rose from the

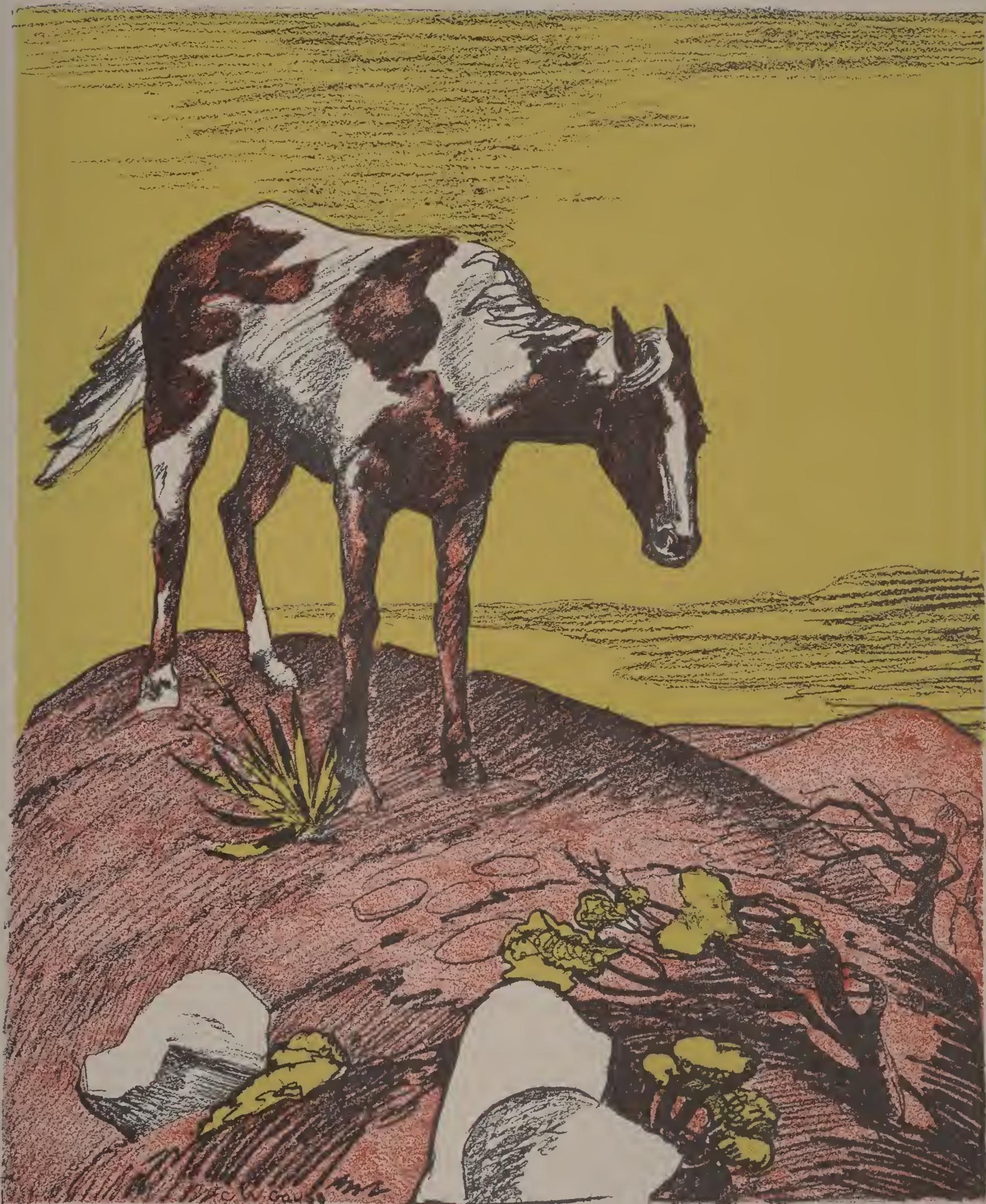


ground on whirring wings. Each day there seemed to be less to eat. After a time Kickapoo had to work all day and part of the night to keep from being hungry. Hollows began to show in his sides which had always been fat and sleek.

The weather became hot and dry, and dust-storms began. The wind blew all day long, sucking up from the ground little whirlpools of sand that joined with clouds of dust to darken the air. It was hard to breathe, and Kickapoo held his eyes nearly shut because of the dirt in the air. Hungry and thirsty, he wandered from one spot to another, hunting for shelter that was not there.

Finally there was so much sand on the grass that if cattle ate it, they grew sick. The cowboys said, "Let's drive our cattle nearer home; then they can eat hay at the feed lots."

A day or two later Kickapoo heard a great rumbling noise coming closer and closer. Through the



He wandered from one spot to another

dust he could see the herd coming in. The cowboys came riding with their lariat ropes, driving the cattle before them.

Kickapoo whinnied for joy. He thought he could go home with the cattle, where Buster would welcome him and give him shelter and a good supper. He did not know his master had gone away. As fast as he could, he limped across the mesa and joined the herd.

“What is that lame horse doing in with our calves?” shouted a cowboy. No one knew; so he cut Kickapoo out from the herd and drove him away.

Kickapoo went and stood in an arroyo, trying to hide from the dust-laden wind. An arroyo is the dry bed of a stream and usually has high sides. After a time he climbed out and wandered on alone in the direction of the ranch.

The next morning Kickapoo found himself standing outside the fence at the feed lots. He knew well that cow ponies were inside there, eating hay. Kickapoo whinnied and whinnied. He thought the men could not hear him, for no one came to open the gate. Finally he strayed away to the chuck wagon.

A chuck wagon is a kind of trailer where the cook bakes flapjacks and cooks meat for the cowboys. Kickapoo smelled at the ground, trying to find some-

thing to eat. But he found only a scrap or two before the cook chased him away. Alone on the mesa again, Kickapoo wondered why there seemed to be no place for him. Always before he had been admired more than any of the other cow ponies.

All day long the sand blew and blew. Its sharp grains cut Kickapoo's hide and made it sore. There was no shelter from the wind and the stinging sand. Kickapoo was very hungry, for no sensible horse would eat grass that was full of sand.

He was very thirsty, too. There was a little water in the big river, but he did not want to go there because coyotes lived near it. Kickapoo knew that he might not be the winner in a fight now that he was lame.

In the late afternoon Kickapoo could stand his thirst no longer. He went to the river and drank and drank, all the time keeping a watchful eye on coyote town. That was a flat place with large holes in the ground where the coyotes slept in the daytime.

While Kickapoo was drinking, a small gray coyote came out. She did not see the cow pony on account of the dust; she could not smell him because the wind blew the wrong way. Soon three more coyotes came out. They came together and sang their evening song.

They sang so loudly they must have thought their music was sweet. But Kickapoo did not like it. He thought it was the worst noise he ever had heard. He stood wild-eyed and trembling, afraid to come up from the river. Then he saw the shadowy shape of a very large, old coyote. Broken Nose, himself, had come out of his den.

Kickapoo was so frightened that he climbed the bank of the river and ran away. He ought to have known better, for now Broken Nose could see that he was lame, and a smart coyote knows that a lame horse is most likely a poor fighter.

It grew dark. The night was black, for dust hid the moon, and the wind roared across the mesa. Kickapoo felt lonely and afraid. In the darkness he heard Broken Nose calling to his band. It sounded as if he were telling every other coyote to come and find the prize bronco who could not fight any more.





Broken Nose himself had come out of his den

Kickapoo went and poked his nose between two rocks and waited there.

The howling and yelping coyotes came nearer. Soon they were right at Kickapoo's heels. One baby coyote who was not very smart, tried to nip Kickapoo's left hind leg. Kickapoo swiftly gave a kick that made the young coyote roll over backwards. Then it yelped for its mother to come.

That made the other coyotes afraid of the cow pony's hind legs. They squatted on the mesa and talked things over in their own way. Broken Nose had a plan. He sneaked around and bit Kickapoo in the side. Kickapoo jerked his nose from between the rocks. That was just what the coyotes wanted, for it gave them a chance to surround him.

Kickapoo was a good fighter still. Days of rest had helped to heal his shoulder, and he did not limp nearly so much. Now he kicked and kicked and at the first opportunity, ran right through the pack of coyotes and started across the mesa. Far away a light made a dim yellow glow through the dust; so he ran that way.

Across the mesa he came to the fence in front of a small house. Two large police dogs rushed out. When the coyotes heard those fierce voices, each one

ran away quickly. In one minute all was quiet, with not a coyote in sight.

Kickapoo did not know that he had happened to reach Pete's house. He did not even know that he was really Pete's horse. But the place seemed friendly, and he thought he would stay around there.

In the morning Pete was much surprised to find Kickapoo standing at his front gate.

"Hello, old fellow," called Pete. "How did you get here? You look hungry. I'll see what I can find."

Pete ran into the house and a moment later he and his sister Helen returned with a pan of dry carrot peelings.

"This is all we have," said Pete, as he held the pan while Kickapoo ate.

The carrot skins tasted very good, but after eating them the pony was still hungry. Pete wondered if just once he could give him a little of the mule's food.

"I don't think so," Helen said. "Our mule has to work. It wouldn't be fair to take his breakfast and give it to your horse."

Pete had an idea. "Farmers are hauling sugar beets to the factory," he said. "If we could get to the big cement highway, we might find some beets dropped from the trucks."



Helen agreed. "That's a long walk," she said. "I will get us a lunch to take along while you put a bridle on your horse."

"All right," replied Pete. "I won't ride him because he's so hungry. I'll lead him, and you and I can walk."

So the three of them started on their way. As they were going along, they met the boss of the Diamond Tail Ranch.

"Good morning," said the boss.

Pete shook hands with the man, then he said eagerly, "I should like to have a job herding calves for you. I wouldn't lose any, for I have a horse to help me."

The boss looked at Kickapoo. "Is that lame horse yours? Well, I don't think he could herd calves."

Pete and Helen walked on, leading Kickapoo. Pete said, "If I could get a job, I could buy feed for my horse."



"Nobody will hire you with that lame horse," discouraged Helen.

When they came to the highway at last, Kickapoo sniffed along the road. He could smell where sugar beets and ears of corn had fallen, but they had already been picked up by steers that had arrived first. Pete and Helen and Kickapoo walked along the highway for almost a mile before they admitted that it was no use; there was no food to be found for poor Kickapoo.

As they turned around and started back home, Pete and Helen decided that it would be shorter to cut across a corner of the mesa than to follow the road the long way. And that is what they did. After going a short way, Helen said, "Let's stop here and rest while we eat our lunch." They had cornbread with molasses and an apple apiece. It didn't seem right for them to eat while Kickapoo went hungry; so they gave the spotted bronco half their corn-

bread and the two apple cores. Kickapoo swallowed his share in a hurry. Then they started on their way.

It was midafternoon when dark clouds appeared near the horizon and approached swiftly. The air looked gray, as if it were going to rain, but instead of feeling soft and wet, it was dry and harsh and almost suffocating.

“It’s another dust storm!” cried Helen.

“Hang onto my arm so that we can’t lose each other,” ordered Pete, “and let’s hurry. The road can’t be far now.”

They held their handkerchiefs up to their faces in order to keep the sand out of their noses and throats. For some time they struggled together against the wind and dirt. The dust was so thick they could not see far. At last, when they felt they surely should be at the road, they came instead to a bunch of big calves. These were very wild and ran away down an arroyo.

“Oh,” gasped Helen. “We must have gotten turned around somehow. We’re lost!”

One of the calves had run very close by Pete, and he had seen that its flank was branded with a diamond and a tail.

“Not lost yet,” said Pete, trying to be cheerful.

"Those calves are Diamond-tailers. We must be near Diamond Tail Ranch."

With lowered heads they went on, the cow pony close behind. Each hoped that Pete was right.

Soon Pete cried, "There's a wall just ahead. It looks like an old hay barn."

And it was. Pete felt with his hands until he found the door. Then he and Helen went inside and pulled Kickapoo after them. There they waited for the storm to blow over.

When the sun went down, the wind stopped blowing, leaving a thin fog of dust over the mesa.

"Now we can start for home again," said Pete to Helen. But almost before he finished speaking, from outside they heard the calls of half-grown calves, "Maa-maa." And Kickapoo heard the dreadful yell that was the hunting cry of his old enemy, Broken Nose. At once the fighting bronco snorted and blew bubbles, and his eyes looked like fire.

Pete threw open the door of the hay barn. Quickly he jumped onto Kickapoo's back and rode the cow pony out upon the mesa. He saw the bunch of Diamond Tail calves running, with the coyotes after them. Broken Nose was trying to scare the calves and then tire them out. He kept them running around in

a circle. They bawled and bawled, but the Diamond Tail cowboys were too far away to hear them.

The fighting bronco was still lame, but he knew how to round up calves. He had done that hundreds of times with Buster. Now, with Pete on his back, he went between the calves and the coyotes. Then he made the calves get close together, so that he could drive them. Pete shouted and drove the coyotes away. This was fun for Kickapoo; he liked roundups.

Together, Pete and the cow pony drove the calves to the Diamond Tail Ranch. There a great many cow ponies were having a fine supper of hay and corn. Kickapoo had worked hard and was very, very hungry.

A man was watching the horses.

"Good evening, sir," Pete called. "Are these your calves?"

"Those calves have been lost for a week," answered the man, who, Pete now saw, was the boss of the ranch. "We thought the coyotes had gotten them." He called a cowboy to take care of the calves; then he looked at Kickapoo and at Pete. "Are you the boy who asked me for a job this morning?"

"Yes, sir," Pete replied.

"Well," said the boss, "you did good work, bring-



Kickapoo had a fine supper of hay and corn

ing those calves home. I think I will hire you. I can pay you a dollar a week."

"Oh, thank you," cried Pete. "I'll work hard, but my horse will have to work even harder. He's hungry. We haven't enough to feed him at my house."

"Your horse can stay here, if you like," the boss offered, "and he can have all that he wants to eat."

Following the boss, Pete led Kickapoo to a shed where he had a fine supper of hay and corn. Then Pete went back to the hay barn for Helen, and they hurried home to tell the news of Pete's job.

Early the next morning Pete and Kickapoo began to work. Their job was to round up calves. Pete saved the money he earned and bought a saddle. Then he was a real cowboy.

Kickapoo grew fat and strong and, after a time, limped hardly at all. He was a good worker again. There was one thing he could not do; he could not take part in rodeos. But he did not mind that at all. He did not care about having his picture in the newspaper, nor did he like to wear a blue ribbon on his mane. Certainly he did not like to have a fierce steer run a long horn into his shoulder.

Kickapoo was happy once more. He did like to have a master and a job.





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